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INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9678  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6614  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4674  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3389  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0326  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3476  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0492  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2566  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7154  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4959  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 002043

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2016

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN JAFFNA DIRE

REF: COLOMBO 2037 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During the Ambassador's December 7 visit to Jaffna, Government Agent Mr. K. Ganesh (protect throughout) expressed deep concern for the humanitarian situation in Jaffna, particularly with regard to nutrition and livelihoods. Since August 11, when the Tigers attacked the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Forward Defense Line (FDL) east of Jaffna, the A9 highway has remained closed. Since then, the GSL has taken responsibility for trying to feed most of the 660,000 residents of Jaffna via shipments by sea. Although shipments of basic staples such as rice and dhal were adequate in November, UNICEF told us that there are virtually no protein sources or vegetables, so nutrition is inadequate. Fishing restrictions and lack of building supplies have left fishermen and laborers out of work. The LTTE has threatened private traders to prevent them from opening their shops, which are under-stocked in any case. The LTTE has also rejected the GSL's offer to reopen the A9 highway for a one-time humanitarian supply convoy (reftel). The lack of livelihoods and other deprivations play into the LTTE's hands by increasing sympathy among the captive population in Jaffna for its cause. End Summary.

Concern for Nutrition

¶2. (C) In a December 7 meeting with the Ambassador, Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K. Ganesh expressed deep concern for the humanitarian situation in Jaffna, particularly with regards to nutrition and livelihoods. Since August 11, when the Tigers attacked the Government of Sri Lanka Forward Defense Line south of Jaffna, the A9 highway has remained closed. Since then, the GSL has taken responsibility for trying to feed the 660,000 residents of Jaffna via shipments by sea. Prior to the August 11 closure of the A9 highway, an average of 150-180 trucks per day transported food and supplies to Jaffna, according to the GA. The private sector catered to approximately 80% of the population. Since August 11, the GSL has provided for approximately 485,000 civilians (over 70% of the population of the Jaffna peninsula) through

576 food cooperatives. Private suppliers, lacking LTTE security guarantees, have so far refused to pay the insurance costs to ship food to Jaffna. To compound matters, the LTTE has warned private traders against opening their shops.

13. (C) A UNICEF representative told Ambassador December 7 that though rice and lentil supplies are adequate, there are almost no protein or vegetables available to average citizens, who risk undernourishment. On the peninsula, 169,000 people live below the poverty line. The price of vegetables and other foodstuffs has gone up 200-300% since August. Monthly government food stamps for the poorest families provide little more than a day of food at these inflated prices. In addition to 50,000 families living below the poverty line, military High Security Zones (HSZ) have displaced approximately 75,000 people since the 1990s. Government-supplied food stocks, the GA added, can feed each of these families for approximately two weeks. Beyond those rations, civilians must fend for themselves. Local milk and poultry production has decreased significantly due to lack of animal feed.

#### LIVELIHOODS HAVE DISAPPEARED

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14. (C) Only a small number of Jaffna's 18,000 fishing families are allowed to fish because of concerns the LTTE will co-opt them or use them to smuggle people or weapons. Laborers and masons are also out of work. Private traders and NGOs cannot bring up building or other materials so many of their activities have stopped. Although GSL hospitals are adequately supplied, medical supplies are not available to private doctors and pharmacies. The price of one dose of an over-the-counter fever reducer/painkiller is USD \$1 on the private market. (In Colombo, a 60-dose box costs approximately \$1.80.)

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#### SUPPLY BY SEA INADEQUATE

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15. (C) Supply delivery by sea is slow due to rough seas and the inability of large supply ships to dock at one of two Jaffna ports, the GA told Ambassador. Since the waters near the piers are silted, barges must offload the supply ships before over-taxed cooperative shops can distribute goods to civilians. A December 6 report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicated that GSL supplies of food by ship are adequate but that livelihoods would improve tremendously through the reopening of the A9 highway. GA Ganesh stressed - asking for confidentiality, because his views are at variance with the

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government position - that opening the A9 was necessary in order to link the civilians of Jaffna to essential commodities.

16. (C) COMMENT: Despite the Government of Sri Lanka's legitimate and commendable efforts to supply food staples to Jaffna, civilians are suffering in a multitude of ways. Adequate nutrition cannot be assured; medicines are lacking and exorbitantly expensive. Government distribution points are over-burdened; private shops are cut out of the distribution chain. The Government Agent, an ethnic Tamil, was unusually candid about Jaffna's problems and clearly enjoys the confidence of the Tamil community since he hosted an equally frank discussion with Jaffna Professors and students. The lack of livelihoods and the many other deprivations play directly into the LTTE's hands. Ambassador met with the Foreign Minister on December 11 to review in detail the humanitarian and human rights situation (septsels).

BLAKE